

Lunatic, Liar, Lord?

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[0 : 00] I'm delighted to be here and delighted to see many of you here, delighted and excited for the opportunity to have a members meeting and think it only appropriate and right to spend a little time in God's Word before we do that.

I love the rhythm that we have of worshiping and out of our common worshiping life moving into a members meeting because that's just an extension of worship and how we do life together.

The problem of Jesus is something that everybody has to confront. The problem of Jesus is something that everybody has to deal with in one way or another.

And by that phrase, I mean this. I mean that every single person in the world has to make sense out of the things that Jesus did and the things that Jesus said about himself.

Many people today like to think of Jesus as one of many great moral teachers who had an outsized impact on the world.

[1 : 06] someone from whom there are things we might learn but nothing more. But as we'll see this morning, that explanation simply does not work.

Because that is not how Jesus described himself. And there's not a single person who regarded Jesus that way after meeting him face to face.

people may have assumed that he was a great moral teacher before they met him. But when people met Jesus as one commentator says, he tended to have one of three effects on them.

Hatred, terror, or adoration. Or adoration. Hatred, terror, or adoration.

Whatever else they may have thought, they realized this is no mere moral teacher. So the question this morning that we want to ask is, who is Jesus?

[2 : 06] We're going to be looking at this passage in Mark chapter 3. We will see the confusion over Jesus' identity, the truth of Jesus' identity, and then the implications of Jesus' identity.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for your word. And every week we come with all kinds of distractions and questions and needs and longings.

Some of us are here ready to pay rapt attention. Many of us may feel distracted or pulled apart by all of the things in our lives. Lord, all the noise. Lord, I pray that you would quiet the noise.

That you would still our hearts. That you would open our minds and our hearts to receive what you have for us this morning. Lord, what we most need is your presence.

What we most need is to hear from you. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. So first of all, let's look at the confusion over Jesus' identity. After Jesus began his public ministry, word begins to spread about him.

[3 : 07] And soon, everybody's talking about Jesus. Everybody in the region is buzzing about this new cutting-edge rabbi. And they're all trying to make sense of the things that they are seeing and hearing.

And there are a few possible explanations that begin to emerge to make sense of Jesus. And these are the same ideas that have persisted for 2,000 years all the way up to D.C. in 2024.

The first possibility that begins to emerge, the first explanation, is that Jesus is simply a lunatic.

That he's lost his mind.

In verse 21, it says that his ministry has caused such a disturbance that when he goes home and tries to eat with his family, they can't eat because there are too many people surrounding the house trying to get Jesus' attention.

It's chaos. And so his own family members try to silence him because they think that he's lost his mind. Don't skip over the fact that it's his own family.

[4 : 12] They're the ones who think he's crazy. If you have ever felt misunderstood or unappreciated by your family, you're not alone. The same thing has happened to Jesus. So the

question is, why are they reacting this way?

Well, look at some of the things that Jesus has said about himself. In just the previous chapter, in Mark chapter 2, some men bring their paralyzed friend to Jesus to be healed.

And Jesus responds by saying, son, your sins are forgiven. Now, everybody knew, everybody in this society knew, the only one who has the authority to forgive sin is God.

So Jesus is claiming to do something only God can do. And it says people were astounded and amazed by that. Later in the same chapter, Jesus refers to himself as the Lord of the Sabbath.

Well, there's only one Lord of the Sabbath, and that's the one who established it at creation. Again, God himself. So it begins to raise this question, what kind of person would claim to have equal status and authority with God?

[5 : 20] And so some people were saying, well, this man is clearly delusional. He's delusional. He's a lunatic. The second possibility that we see beginning to emerge here is this man isn't so much crazy as he is more of a malicious liar.

Some of the religious leaders come from Jerusalem to investigate Jesus. And they see him do these incredible things. And they see the way the crowds respond to these incredible miracles that Jesus is doing.

He's healing people. He's casting out demons. Now, notice they don't deny the fact that the miracles happen. You know, if you're trying to discredit the new cutting-edge rabbi who's taking all of your followers, if you're trying to discredit that person, the easiest thing to do would be to say, nobody can raise those who are paralyzed.

Nobody can give sight to the blind. Those are fake. He's a charlatan. He's faking it. But they don't even try to make that argument. And that's simply because there are too many eyewitnesses who know that these things actually happen.

So they do the only other thing they can do. They attribute those miracles to Satan. They accuse Jesus of being an evil, demon-possessed man pretending to be divine.

[6 : 42] So here we have Jesus who has made these grandiose claims to have equal status with God. And he does it publicly and he does it repeatedly.

And you can see his followers just being like, oh, if you would just not say that thing, it would be so much easier. And every time he says it, you can see them cringing. People are going to think you're crazy.

So how do we make sense of it? These are two possible explanations. He's either a delusional lunatic or he's a malicious liar. But there is a problem with these explanations.

And that problem emerges when you hold the things that Jesus says up against his life. And you look at the way he actually lived and interacted with people.

Because you see, history is filled with people who have claimed to be God. But typically, those people are either floridly psychotic or they are megalomaniacs.

[7 : 40] Right? They're delusional narcissists who are obsessed with status. And they're obsessed with power. And they only want to associate with other people who are high status, high power people.

But Jesus always appears extremely lucid and sane and honest. And he's extraordinarily humble. There's no hint of megalomaniacal narcissism in any of Jesus' interactions. Everywhere he goes, he's caring for the poor. He's caring for the sick.

He's seeking out the outcasts and the unclean. He's hanging around with people of the lowest status. When in this culture, the people that you dined with were, that was really a signal as to your status and your importance.

And he gets criticized by the religious leaders because they look at the people around his table.

And he's dining with the dregs of society, which is communicating that Jesus is among the dregs of society.

[8 : 45] That doesn't sound like a delusional narcissist. This doesn't sound like someone with a belief that he's the all-powerful creator of the universe either.

How could somebody go around claiming to have divine status, to be the lord of the Sabbath, to have the authority to forgive sin, and yet also dine with the dregs of society?

It doesn't sound like a malicious lie. It doesn't sound like delusion. It doesn't add up. There's something that doesn't fit. When you try to take those explanations and you hold them up against his life, it just doesn't work.

Nobody would believe that. Now, of course, in modern times, as we have gotten more distance historically from these original events and original accounts, people began to say, well, you know, Jesus may not be a lunatic or a liar, but that's because Jesus never actually existed. You know, this is all the stuff of legend. These are just stories from a pre-scientific world. And many people have tried to make that argument, many people who are a lot smarter than I am. But there's simply too much evidence to the contrary.

[9 : 55] Bart Ehrman, if you know him, is a well-known New Testament scholar, and he's a vehement skeptic. He's not a Christian. And yet when people ask him, a lot of atheists will kind of cozy up next to him and say, well, I mean, you and I both know, you know, Jesus never actually existed.

And here's what Ehrman will say. Now, he's a critic of Christianity, but here's what he will say. This is not even an issue for scholars of antiquity. The reason for thinking Jesus existed is because he is abundantly attested to in early sources.

If you want to go where the evidence goes, I think that atheists have done themselves a disservice by jumping on the bandwagon of mythicism. Because frankly, it makes you look foolish to the outside world.

If that's what you're going to believe, you just look foolish. He's basically saying, listen, if you follow the evidence, there's no question this man existed. That claim is absolutely untenable.

But there is another version of the legend argument that says, well, okay, maybe Jesus did exist, but obviously he was just a normal person. And over time, his followers wanted to start this religion, and so they started making up all this stuff about him to give credibility to their movement.

[11 : 10] But that actually quickly starts to fall apart for several reasons. Number one, we know that the gospel accounts and the writings of Paul, places where they say that Jesus was God, that he rose from the dead, that these were all written within the lifetime of the eyewitnesses, right, within only 15 or 20 years of Jesus' crucifixion.

It would be absolutely foolish in a relatively small, highly interconnected region like this, where word spreads like wildfire. It would be foolish to try to make up a bunch of stuff about a guy named Jesus, who just very recently was publicly executed, if there are still lots of people around who saw these things happen.

That would be insane to try to do that. The second thing we need to understand is, the Jewish religion was absolutely unique in the world because their entire identity and culture as a people was built around the idea that there was only one God.

Their entire identity as Jewish people was defined by the idea that there was only one God. Nobody else thought that way. So they are the least likely people in the world to believe that a human being could be God the way Jesus claimed to be God.

The idea that a bunch of first century Jews concocted the idea that this man was God, or even second or third century Jews concocted the idea that this man was God, runs against the very heart and soul of their entire culture and religion.

[12 : 46] It would be the worst form of blasphemy. So if you're trying to get a religion off the ground, and you're trying to maybe convert some of your fellow Jews, this would be unbelievably implausible.

And there's evidence to suggest that because it was so implausible, there's evidence to suggest that even Jesus' closest followers had a very hard time coming to terms with it. This is part of how we understand.

His own family said, you must be crazy. Because the claim to be God was so utterly absurd in their culture. The third issue with this legend argument is that the claim that Jesus was God did not help the Christians.

It hurt them terribly. It was that claim, it was that claim that set them up to be seen as enemies by the Romans.

Right? Because everybody knew you could worship whatever God you wanted, but you had to worship the emperor. And everybody also knew that if you didn't worship the right gods, that bad things would happen. And so a famine comes along or a disease sweeps through.

[13 : 56] And people are looking, who angered the gods? Who made the gods angry? Who's to blame for this divine punishment? Well, it's the Christians. Because they claim to worship and follow Jesus alone as their God.

They don't follow the Roman gods. They don't follow the emperor. And that's why they got persecuted. They were seen as atheists because they refused to worship the pantheon. And so the claim to worship and follow Jesus as God meant they got harassed.

They got rejected. They couldn't get jobs. They had to move out of the cities because they were being persecuted so horribly. They got arrested. They got tortured. They got executed oftentimes as a form of public entertainment.

All for claiming that. All they had to do was to renounce the idea that Jesus was divine. But they refused. And they died in droves. So the idea that this was somehow a legend used to prop up the Christian faith.

Christians bled and died because of this. So this is the problem of Jesus. He claims publicly and repeatedly that he is God, that he has equal status and authority with God. And there are only four possible explanations for this.

[15:06] I mean, as we've seen, the first three do not work. Is he a lunatic? Is he a liar? No, his life simply argues too much to the contrary. Well, is he simply a legend?

Again, the evidence is too strong against the idea that this is a legend of some kind, which leaves only one remaining option, which is that Jesus is in fact Lord, that he is in fact God in the flesh, which brings us into the truth of Jesus' identity.

When the religious leaders accuse Jesus of being a malicious liar in league with Satan, look how Jesus responds, and this is so brilliant. He points out the absurdity of their reasoning.

He says, you know, if I'm casting out demons and setting people free, I'm setting people free from demons. And you're attributing that to Satan?

Why would Satan cast out Satan? Why would Satan work against Satan? What would Satan hope to accomplish with that strategy? He says that whole idea is absurd. But then look what he says.

[16:13] If Jesus is not in league with Satan, if that's absurd and untenable, there is another explanation for what they're seeing. Verse 27, no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods unless he first binds the strong man.

Then indeed he may plunder his house. Now this is a parable. What does the house represent? This present world. And the strong man is Satan.

And Jesus is saying that currently, up until now, Jesus is the strong man who has enslaved the world. He's taken everyone captive. He's taken the world hostage.

He's attempted a coup against God. So who's the one who enters the house, binds the strong man, and plunders his goods?

Jesus is talking about himself. This is how Jesus talks about his own identity. He's talking about his identity. He's talking about his mission.

[17:19] Jesus has come to the world to bind and to ultimately defeat Satan and to plunder his goods. What does it mean to plunder the goods of the strong man's house?

Well, it's all the things that Jesus has been doing. To preach the gospel. To heal the sick. To seek justice for the oppressed. To cast out demons.

To give sight to the blind. To make the unclean clean. To forgive sin. In short, Jesus has come to set us free and to set captives free throughout the world.

Right now, before we consider the implications of that, I want to point out that Jesus is saying something very important about the nature of unbelief. The reason that people do not believe in Jesus is not simply because it is irrational or there is no evidence.

Right? People say, well, if you just gave me better evidence, if I could just have better proof, then I would believe. But that's a misunderstanding of the nature of unbelief. A moment ago, we laid out one of many rational arguments for why people should believe in the divinity of Jesus.

[18:33] And there is a lot of evidence out there in addition to that, especially concerning the resurrection that supports the idea that Jesus is God. But here's the point I want to make.

Like, if the only thing that we need to believe in Jesus is evidence, if the only thing that we need to believe in Jesus is a solid intellectual argument, then everyone who met Jesus would have believed in him immediately.

But that's not what we see happening. Right here in this passage, there are people who met Jesus face to face. There are people who grew up with Jesus, who hear Jesus with their own ears and see the things that he does with their own eyes, who still don't believe in him.

His own family thinks he's crazy. In John chapter 7, it says, even his brothers did not believe him. But then, after his resurrection, thousands and then millions of people begin to believe, including his family.

They didn't believe up until the resurrection, and then all of a sudden, after the crucifixion and resurrection, they begin to believe. His brother James becomes a major leader in the church. His brother James may have been one of the ones who was trying to silence Jesus, saying, everybody's gonna think you're crazy.

[19 : 52] And then he becomes one of the main leaders in the church. How do we explain that? Well, it's because the biggest barrier to faith isn't intellect. Intellectual argument is important.

It's very important. Don't get me wrong. This is not anti-intellectualism. But we don't wanna overestimate the importance of a rational argument. The biggest object to faith isn't intellectual. It's spiritual. We are spiritually held captive. We are imprisoned in the strong man's house. And as the apostle Paul says, our hearts are darkened.

Our thinking has become futile. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus defeated Satan. And now he is plundering Satan's house.

He is setting captives free. He's raising people to new life. He's opening hearts to the gospel. It's happening right now, all around the world. So for anyone in our lives who is not a follower of Jesus, the most important thing that we can do for the people in our lives is not to argue with them.

[21 : 03] There is a place for that. There's a place for apologetics. There's a place for rational argument. I love apologetics. But the most important thing is not to argue with them. It's to pray for them.

It's to recognize that the battle that needs to be won in their hearts is primarily spiritual. So this is the confusion over Jesus's identity, the implications of, or the truth of Jesus's identity.

He's the stronger man who has come to bind the strong man, to set the captives free. Here are the implications of Jesus's identity. Because of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus, as he says, all sins can be forgiven.

That's the major implication. There is nothing that stands in the way of you, of me, coming to know God personally. What we see here is that Jesus accomplished everything necessary for that on the cross.

So all we need to do is come to him in faith and in repentance. And we can be reconciled to God. And people say, well, what about right here? It talks about the unforgivable sin and how do I know if I'm committing that sin?

[22 : 11] And that used to give me a lot of anxiety. If you look at the context, you see what Jesus is really talking about here. He's talking about willful blindness. He's saying, there are people whose eyes have been opened.

There are people who see the truth. They look at the evidence. They look at the, and they begin to see who Jesus really is. And they knowingly reject him. That they reject what's right in front of them. And we say, well, why is that unforgivable? Well, it's because they're cutting themselves off from the only source of forgiveness available. If you deny what you see and hear with your own eyes and ears, if you reject Jesus and attribute the work of Jesus and the Holy Spirit to the work of demons, you're cutting yourself off from the only source of forgiveness that exists in the world.

So for those of us who are here who are not Christians, the good news is this. We have before us the reality of the one who has come to set us free.

And he has declared all sin can be forgiven. All sin can be atoned for, has been atoned for on the cross. And so there is a question for those of us who are not believers.

[23 : 27] How do you make sense of the claims that Jesus made about himself when you look at them next to his life? How do you know, how do you know that there isn't something here on offer for you?

Do you understand that forgiveness is on offer and that it is as, it is as available to you as it could possibly be, meaning that if you ask for it right now, it will be granted.

Right? Jesus came to forgive all sin for those who ask. But there's another thing we need to see here, and that is that Jesus' ultimate aim is not just to save us individually. All of this wasn't accomplished just so that we could get right with God.

That's a big central part of it. But at the end of our passage, Jesus is surrounded by a crowd, and someone tells him, hey, your mother and brothers have come to see you.

And the expectation would have been that Jesus would say, hold on a minute, my family's here, nobody's more important than my family, and that he would go and see what his family wanted. But look what Jesus does instead. He stays where he is, and he says, well, who are my mother and my brothers?

[24 : 37] And he looks at all the people sitting around him, and he says, here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of God, he is my mother and my sister and my brother.

And we need to understand the shift that is happening here. We need to understand the implications of this. Jesus is giving us here a glimpse of the full scope of his mission to establish a new family in the world that is made up of people from every tribe and every tongue and every nation.

And in this new family that Jesus is establishing, they're not bound together by blood. They're not bound together by race. They're not bound together by culture or even by language.

The bond is so much deeper than any of those things. It's a spiritual bond of all of those who have been joined to Christ by faith.

In other words, the implication of Jesus' identity is that we all have the opportunity to share in that identity. His identity becomes our identity.

[25 : 42] And that forms a new spiritual family in the world. And because we share in Jesus' identity, guess what we also share in? Jesus' mission. The purpose for which he came.

What does that mean? We are called to help plunder the strong man's house. What does that mean? Bring the gospel to the world. See those who are held captive by sin and death set free by the good news of Jesus Christ.

To do the work of justice and mercy. To care for the poor and the sick. Right? Wherever we find them. That's why the church is here. We are here to plunder the strong man's house together with Jesus.

And listen, the world is full of people who need to be set free. The world is full of people many of whom are right outside the doors of this church.

Some of whom are in the doors of this church who are longing for a true sense of identity. For a true sense of belonging.

[26 : 45] And Jesus is saying that can be found in one place only. In the family of God. The church of Jesus Christ. And it's our shared calling as God's family in the world to continue to plunder the strong man's house until Jesus comes again.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for your work in this world. We thank you that when many, when perhaps over the ages, people were so tempted to look at the world and to give up.

Lord, when things, even at their most hopeless moments, that you have never stopped loving this world. And that you have never stopped pursuing its redemption and its renewal.

And we thank you for Jesus. We thank you for the blessing of beginning to understand who he truly is. We thank you that salvation and renewal do not hinge or depend on our actions or on our strategies.

But they hinge on what you have accomplished on the cross. We thank you that all of these things that we long for, yet we do not yet see, all of these things are certain because of the cross.

[28 : 03] That the future is secure. That the new creation is coming. We thank you for the glimmers and glimpses of that we get to see here and now. And we pray for your Holy Spirit to fill us as we plunder the house, as we set people free, as we preach and proclaim the gospel.

We pray that you would fill us with a holy zeal to see your name proclaimed among all nations, that one day this city would not be known as a center of human culture or political power.

that it would be known as a place where Jesus Christ is worshipped as Lord. We pray this in your son's holy name. Amen.